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AUTHOR Vorp, Ron
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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) to identify the functions that students feel are important for a community college to perform, the characteristics that students consider attractive in a college, and students' ratings of MDCC in terms of those same characteristics. Questionnaires were distributed in class to 4,700 students. Study findings, based on a 40% response rate, included the following: (1) over 90% of the respondents agreed with statements that it was important for a community college to provide students with the opportunity to become broadly educated; to help them acquire depth of knowledge; and to prepare them to communicate effectively, analyze and express ideas, and identify and solve problems; (2) the items which fewest students thought were important were those concerning extracurricular activities, cultural events, and developing personal independence; (3) when students were asked to rate their ideal college on various factors, high ratings were given to faculty-related items, advising/counseling, quality education, job preparation, library facilities, and flexible schedules; and (4) counseling, advising, career planning, and job placement at MDCC received relatively low ratings in relationship to students' perceptions of the importance of these services. (AAC)

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MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: DO STUDENTS GET WHAT THEY WANT?

Research Report No. 88-25

September 1988

Ron Vorp

Research Associate, Sr.

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Miami-Dade Community College:
Do Students Get What They Want?

Introduction/Synopsis

Purpose

The purpose of the following report is to present results of the college image survey administered to students at Miami-Dade Community College (M-DCC). The college image survey was designed to assess which functions students feel it is important for a community college to perform, which characteristics students consider attractive in a college, and how students rate those same characteristics at M-DCC. Surveys were administered to students in courses selected to give a sample representative of the student body.

Context

Colleges around the United States experienced high enrollment in the sixties and early seventies as a result of the post World War II "baby-boom" generation reaching college-age and the war in Vietnam causing many individuals to choose college as an alternative to the armed forces. It was during this period that many institutions expanded their facilities and new community colleges arose to accommodate the increase in demand. Competition for students developed when the pool of available students began to taper off and, as a result, some colleges and universities adopted an enrollment management approach. With this approach began the investigation of variables which impacted enrollment.

M-DCC recently adopted such an approach and modified a consulting group's college image survey in order to investigate factors which affect enrollment at this college. Versions were adapted for administration to three populations: current students, high school seniors and adults in the community. The present report is based on the results of the survey given to students enrolled at M-DCC during the Winter Term of the 1987-88 academic year.

Major Findings

Approximately forty percent of the 4,700 students who were asked to complete a survey responded and a total of 1,903 surveys were returned. The low response rate was probably related to the length of the survey and the fact that students were asked to complete it during their own time. An offer of entering the students' names into a drawing for free tuition for one semester was used as an incentive.

Analysis of the surveys indicate that the education offered by an institution is a prime factor that students consider important. Over 90% of the respondents agreed with the statements that it was important for a community college to provide the opportunity to become a broadly educated person, to help acquire depth of knowledge, to prepare them to communicate effectively, to analyze and express ideas, and to identify and solve problems. This reinforces the importance of providing a quality general education for students attending M-DCC. Perhaps for recruitment purposes, the most effective message would be one which emphasizes the quality of education at M-DCC.

The items which the fewest students thought were important were those concerning outside activities such as extracurricular activities, cultural events, and developing personal independence.

When asked to rate their ideal college and M-DCC on various factors, faculty related items received high ratings at the ideal college along with advising/counseling, quality education, job preparation, library facilities and flexible schedule.

Counseling and related items such as advising, career planning and job placement at M-DCC received relatively low ratings along with having adequate transportation, a housing program to assist with locating off-campus housing, and a child care program. The counseling-related items are the most important since a relatively high percentage of students considered these attractive at their ideal college. The results suggest that in order

to improve M-DCC's image among its present students, areas with potential are advising /counseling, career planning, and job placement.

Methods

The college image survey used to gather data for this report was modified from one developed by The Ingersoll Group, an enrollment management consulting group providing assistance to M-DCC with the Enrollment Management Project. The modifications were made in order to more accurately address issues of concern to a community college, particularly M-DCC. These modifications were reviewed by the Enrollment Management Research Subcommittee, the Enrollment Management Task Force and the M-DCC Executive Committee before being finalized.

Selection of the class sections to receive the survey was performed by the campus representatives to the Enrollment Management Task Force. In order to obtain a representative distribution the guidelines were: use morning, afternoon and evening classes, use only credit courses, include college preparatory, freshman and upper-level courses, include core and outreach courses. The goal was to obtain a 10% sample of sequence numbers at all campuses except Medical. A 20% sample was called for at Medical Campus due to the small initial size.

Steps were taken in order to maximize cooperation from both faculty and students. Faculty were sent letters from campus vice-presidents stating the importance of the survey and their cooperation. One student from each campus who returned the survey would be selected to receive one semester paid tuition. Faculty were instructed to distribute the survey at the end of class time and collect it at the next class meeting in order to minimize classroom time used in completing the survey. Although the latter may have increased faculty cooperation, it also may have reduced student cooperation due to the imposition on their own time.

Responses to the items were recorded on National Computer Systems answer sheets and entered onto computer disk using an optical mark reading system. The data were then uploaded to an IBM mainframe for matching with

College records containing student demographic data. Analyses were performed using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS).

Items were categorized for presentation by two researchers for the enrollment management project. Any disagreements were resolved by another research associate on the Institutional Research staff.

Results

It is impossible to know exactly how many students received surveys without knowing the exact attendance in each class section on the day the surveys were distributed. However, based on enrollment in each section and a ten percent absentee rate, approximately 4,700 surveys were distributed and 1,903 (40%) were returned.

The results of an analysis to determine how well returned surveys represented the total enrollment at the college are presented in Table 1. The numbers for the survey respondents are slightly low due to some students not having given their student number. Demographics were therefore not available for these students. This analysis shows that the campus and ethnic representation in survey responses are very close to that of the total M-DCC enrollment. The slight over-representation of Medical Campus would be expected since an attempt was made to obtain a 20 percent sample at that campus and a 10 percent sample at the other campuses. With the exception of the full/part-time grouping, the other groupings represented in the survey sample are all approximately 10 percentage points of their proportions in the total enrollment. Full-time students are over-represented in the survey sample by over 20 percentage points. This is most likely due to the higher probability of the full-time student being in a class which received the surveys since most full-time students are enrolled in at least four classes.

Tables 2 through 5 give the percentage of students college-wide and at each campus who considered functions of a community college very important or important. The items which had the highest percentage ratings in these categories are given in Table 2 under General Education Functions.

The top three items suggest that students are interested in some of the more global aspects of education: becoming broadly educated, communicating effectively, and acquiring depth of knowledge. The items in this category which received lower ratings appear to be more specific: basic skills training, "hands-on" type learning, awareness of philosophies and cultures.

Table 3 appears to support the findings presented in Table 2. Analyzing ideas and identifying problems both received relatively high percentages of "important" ratings and are abstract aspects of the educational process.

Table 4 shows that although career functions had slightly lower percentages rating them important than education functions, the percentages at the Wolfson and Medical Campuses were rather high. Apparently more of the students at these campuses are concerned with the career aspects of attending a community college than at the other campuses.

Results presented in Table 5 show that although in general, a lower percentage of respondents considered personal development functions important, identifying personal goals and providing continuing education programs had relatively high percentages. Low percentages included extracurricular activities, living away from home and cultural events. Two of the latter three were slightly higher for Wolfson Campus and slightly lower for Medical Campus.

Tables 6 through 14 show comparisons between the percentage of students who rated items as very attractive or attractive at a community college and the percentage who strongly agreed or agreed that item applied to M-DCC. Table 6 lists results for faculty/staff-related items. The faculty items received the highest percentages of endorsement at the ideal college, indicating that students consider quality faculty an attractive aspect of a community college while the percentages endorsing staff were slightly lower. M-DCC had relatively high percentages agreeing that it has quality faculty but the percentage agreeing M-DCC had accessible staff was considerably lower.

The counseling/advising comparisons between the ideal college setting and M-DCC are given in Table 7. As can be observed, the percentages endorsing these items for the ideal college are high while the endorsements for M-DCC are consistently low. The disparity for this group of items, which can be viewed as the percentage of students expressing dissatisfaction with M-DCC, are among the highest obtained in the survey.

The ideal/M-DCC comparisons for general education items are given in Table 8. Having an excellent transfer program, the item with the highest percentage of endorsement at the ideal college, was also the item which had the lowest percentage of endorsement in this group of items for M-DCC. This item has the largest disparity in the table although it is still only 15 percentage points. Having basic skills courses and variety in the core courses had a slightly lower percentage of endorsement at the ideal college but the percentage endorsement for the ideal college and M-DCC were much closer for these two items.

Table 9 gives ideal/M-DCC comparison on percentages of students who endorsed career related items. These items received relatively high percentages of endorsement at the ideal college but low percentages of M-DCC endorsement. The discrepancies for the job placement, career planning, and practical learning opportunities items were all over 20 percentage points (34, 25 and 22).

Percentages of students who endorsed prestige/quality related items at the ideal college and M-DCC are given in Table 10. Apparently students find the idea of a high quality and reputable school attractive and also rate M-DCC reasonably high. There is also a percentage of students who like the idea of a college having high entrance requirements and being hard to get into. Not surprisingly for an open-door college, M-DCC does not have a high percentage of endorsement for these two items. The entrance requirement item has a difference of 24 percentage points in the percent endorsement for the ideal college and M-DCC.

Ideal/M-DCC comparisons on financial aid-related items are presented in Table 11. Apparently a larger percentage of students find it

attractive having the aid available than find it attractive having information about the aid. However, at M-DCC the percentage endorsement on the information being available is larger than the percentage endorsement on the aid being available. This makes more of a mismatch on the item concerning the actual availability of aid.

Items related to personal development and the percentage of student endorsement for the ideal school and M-DCC are shown in Table 12. Approximately three-quarters of the students endorsed these items for the ideal school while approximately one-half endorsed them for M-DCC. All items had a discrepancy of over 20 percentage points between the two percentages, ranging from 22 to 27 points.

Table 13 gives the percentages of ideal and M-DCC endorsement for items related to facilities and convenience. The items which had the largest percentages of endorsement at the ideal college were related directly to the learning environment. Examples include having a flexible schedule, having a library to meet students needs, and being concerned with meeting the needs of part-time students. These items also received a moderately high percentage of endorsement at M-DCC. The greatest discrepancy in ideal/M-DCC comparisons occurred in items not related directly to the learning environment. These include having a program to help find off-campus housing (36 percentage points) and having adequate transportation to and from campus (25 percentage points). This suggests that the absence of these facilities at M-DCC may be resulting in fairly large percentages of dissatisfied students.

Comparisons of the ideal college and M-DCC for athletic and social items are given in Table 14. The item from this group which the largest percentage of students endorsed was having an active social life with only 51% endorsement for M-DCC. This item also had the largest discrepancy within the group between the percentage who endorsed it for the ideal college and the percentage who endorsed it for M-DCC (24 percentage points).

Summary and Conclusions

The type of functions which the largest percentages of students responded to as important for a community college to perform were those related to education, especially those relating to the general aspects and to the global aspects of education. At the Medical and Wolfson Campuses, higher percentages than at the other two campuses considered career-related functions important. The latter finding may be a result of the larger emphasis put on occupational programs at these two campuses. Perhaps at North and South Campuses the recruitment emphasis could use the quality of the education and the transfer function, while the Medical and Wolfson Campuses could use the advantages of having a quality education along with training in a specific occupation to be successful in that occupation.

For the percentage of students rating aspects of a ideal community college attractive, items related to the faculty were among the highest, indicating the value students put on this contribution to their education. Other items which received a high percentage of endorsement were those related to financial aid, staff and counselors, job placement and career planning. Those relating to staff and counselors, job placement and career planning had a relatively low percentage of students who agreed that M-DCC possessed those qualities. This suggests the possibility that changing aspects of these areas at M-DCC could improve the image of the college among students once they enter.

Other areas also showed a fairly large percentage point difference between the percentage endorsement for the ideal college and the percentage endorsement at M-DCC. These include items related to a program to assist in finding off-campus housing, transportation to and from the college, an active social life program and personal development. The large percentage point differences may indicate a degree of dissatisfaction with these aspects of the college. Perhaps a more in-depth evaluation could be conducted of the desirability and feasibility of implementing some or all of these into the college's functions.

Table 1

Survey Respondents Representation of Total Enrollment
Winter Semester 1987-1988

	Survey Respondents		Total Enrollment	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Campus				
North	399	26.8	12,198	30.2
South	689	46.2	17,805	44.0
Wolfson	238	16.0	7,442	18.4
Medical	164	11.0	2,976	7.4
Ethnic Group				
Black Non-Hispanic	270	18.1	6,558	16.2
Hispanic	732	49.1	20,785	51.4
White Non-Hispanic	436	29.3	12,064	29.8
Other	52	3.5	1,014	2.5
Academic Standing				
3.5 and Above	235	15.8	4,854	12.0
2.0-3.49	1,053	70.7	25,442	62.9
Below 2.0	202	13.6	10,125	25.1
Gender				
Male	511	34.3	17,070	42.2
Female	979	65.7	23,351	57.8
Full/Part Time				
Full Time	835	56.0	13,366	33.1
Part Time	655	44.0	27,055	66.9
Degree Seeking Status				
A.A.	998	67.0	23,747	58.7
A.S.	367	24.6	8,767	21.7
A.G.S.	16	1.1	207	0.5
P.C.	18	1.2	342	0.8
Other	91	6.1	7,358	18.3
Enrollment Status				
New Freshman	151	10.1	3,619	9.0
New Transfer	52	3.5	2,050	5.1
Continuing Student	1,206	80.9	29,846	73.8
Former Student	81	5.5	4,157	10.2
Other	0	0.0	749	1.9

Table 2

Importance of a Community College Performing
General Education Functions
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903	Campus			
		North N=525	South N=826	Wolfson N=337	Medical N=214
	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree
Provide Me With The Opportunity To Become A Broadly-Educated Person (Q#21)	95	95	94	96	96
Prepare Me To Communicate Effectively, Both In Oral And Written Form (Q#8)	95	94	94	97	97
Help Me Acquire Depth Of Knowledge In My Major Academic Discipline (Q#19)	93	93	92	96	95
Prepare Me For Transfer To A Four-Year College (Q#5)	89	91	90	90	84
Teach Basic Skills In Reading, Writing And Math (Q#25)	85	85	82	90	83
Provide A Variety Of Educational Experiences Beyond Traditional Lectures And Labs (Interships, Independent Study, "Hands-on" Projects, etc.) (Q#13)	84	86	81	84	88
Provide Me With An Awareness Of Different Philosophies, Cultures, And Ways Of Life (Q#18)	81	81	80	83	77

Table 3

Importance of a Community College Performing
Critical Thinking Functions
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903 Percent Agree	Campus			
		North N=525 Percent Agree	South N=826 Percent Agree	Wolfson N=337 Percent Agree	Medical N=214 Percent Agree
Teach Me To Analyze Ideas Critically And Express Ideas Effectively (Q#14)	93	92	92	96	93
Teach Me To Identify Problems, Evaluate Evidence, And Pursue Solutions (Q#11)	91	92	89	92	93

Table 4

Importance of a Community College Performing
Career Functions
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903	Campus			
		North N=525	South N=826	Wolfson N=337	Medical N=214
	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree
Prepare Me To Move Into A Career When I Graduate (Q#7)	89	89	85	92	98
Prepare Me To Be An Expert In A Specific Field (Q#12)	88	87	85	92	94
Enable Me To Make More Money (Q#16)	85	85	83	89	91
Offer Programs That Are Completed In Two Years (Q#6)	83	82	80	87	91
Provide A Practical, "Hands-On" Education (Q#24)	83	85	79	85	93

Table 5

Importance of a Community College Performing
Personal Development Functions
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903	Campus			
		North N=525	South N=826	Wolfson N=337	Medical N=214
	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree	Percent Agree
Help Me To Identify Personal Goals And Develop Means Of Achieving Them. (Q#10)	91	91	92	90	91
Offer Continuing Education Programs (Q#22)	88	88	88	88	94
Develop My Leadership Qualities (Q#15)	81	81	80	84	86
Provide Personal Counseling (Q#17)	76	77	76	78	75
Through Cultural Events, Provide Me With An Appreciation Of Music, Drama, And The Fine Arts (Q#9)	60	61	59	68	52
Help Me Develop A Sense Of Confidence And Independence By Living Away From Home (Q#23)	52	57	47	61	48
Provide Involvement In Extra-Curricular Activities Such As Student Government, Theatre Productions, Music Groups, etc. (Q#20)	49	53	46	53	47

Table 6

Percent of Students Endorsing Faculty/Staff Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus: North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has Faculty Members Who Are Excellent Teachers (Q#48)	97	83	97	80	97	81	97	87	99	89
Has a Faculty Which is Concerned With Helping Students Reach Their Maximum Potential (Q#28)	97	83	97	82	97	80	97	85	97	89
Has Faculty Members Who Are Accessible (Q#35)	95	83	94	78	95	83	97	85	96	88
Has Faculty Members Who Are Up-to-Date in Their Fields (Q#45)	95	83	94	78	96	84	95	82	97	88
Has Staff Members Who Are Accessible And Caring (Q#51)	94	76	94	74	94	73	94	82	97	83

Table 7

Percent of Students Endorsing Advising/Counseling Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus							
			North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has An Advising Program That Concentrates On My Academic Major And Overall Curriculum Requirements (Q#36)	96	79	95	75	96	80	97	80	97	82
Has An Excellent Career Planning Program (Q#46)	95	70	95	73	94	64	94	74	99	78
Provides Excellent Personal Counseling (Q#40)	90	61	88	60	91	60	92	65	89	61
Has an Excellent Job Placement Program (Q#42)	89	55	89	58	88	52	91	56	90	56

Table 8

Percent of Students Endorsing General Education Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus							
			North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has An Excellent Program For Transfer To A University (Q#37)	94	79	93	77	94	80	95	78	95	85
Has Courses That Help Me Develop My Basic Skills In Reading, Writing, And Math To Increase My Chances Of Academic Success (Q#54)	91	90	90	89	90	90	93	93	92	87
Has Core Courses That Expose Me To A Variety Of Academic Disciplines (Q#53)	89	81	89	80	89	82	90	80	88	79

Table 9

Percent of Students Endorsing Career Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus							
			North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Offers Programs Leading Directly To A Job (Q#34)	93	74	92	73	93	72	93	76	94	83
Provides Practical Learning Opportunities (Internships, Apprenticeships, etc.) (Q#32)	91	69	89	70	91	66	92	67	93	83
Has a Strong Curriculum In Professional Areas Such As Nursing, Engineering, etc. (Q#47)	86	69	83	70	85	63	84	64	99	93

Table 10

Percent of Students Endorsing Prestige/Quality Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus							
			North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has High Academic Quality (Q#57)	95	82	96	82	95	82	94	79	93	87
Has An Excellent Reputation (Q#39)	95	87	94	86	95	87	95	86	96	93
Has High Entrance Requirements (Q#38)	63	39	65	40	60	33	62	41	68	49
Is Hard To Get Into (Q#55)	33	23	32	24	34	20	34	26	29	26

Table 11

Percent of Students Endorsing Financial Aid Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus							
			North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has A Financial Aid Program That Helps Make College Affordable (Q#29)	94	76	93	76	93	73	95	82	94	79
Has Information Available About Student Loans (Q#33)	88	81	87	79	86	79	94	84	92	85

Table 12

Percent of Students Endorsing Personal Development Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus: North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Is Concerned With My Recognizing Values And The Role They Play In My Life (Q#31)	82	58	83	58	81	54	83	63	85	64
Provides an Emphasis on Moral/Ethical Development (Q#64)	77	55	78	60	74	51	82	56	79	59
Has An Excellent Student Life Program To Help Me Develop Independence (Q#41)	72	45	74	51	71	39	77	49	66	46

Table 13

Percent of Students Endorsing Facilities/Convenience Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus: North N=525		South N=826		Wolfson N=337		Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has A Flexible Schedule Of Courses Offered At A Variety Of Times Throughout The Day And During The Week (Q#61)	97	87	96	86	98	88	97	85	97	86
Has A Library That Meets The Students' Needs (Q#52)	97	83	97	87	98	85	96	76	99	81
Is Concerned With Meeting The Educational Needs Of Part-Time Students (Q#60)	92	79	92	79	90	77	93	80	95	82
Provides Study Skills Assistance ((Q#63)	92	77	91	76	91	74	92	82	94	83
Offers Courses Or Programs That Are Available In A Variety Of Locations Both On- And Off-Campus (Q#62)	89	78	89	78	88	79	87	76	92	76
Has Services To Assist Handicapped Students (Q#56)	85	80	87	84	82	82	88	75	86	73
Has Instructional Sites Near People's Homes And Businesses (Q#49)	78	68	77	65	79	69	76	69	79	65
Has Adequate Transportation To And From The Campus (Q#59)	76	50	73	52	73	45	80	54	85	55
Has A Housing Program That Assists With Finding Off-Campus Housing (Q#58)	68	32	69	38	67	29	70	32	67	29
Provides A Child Care Program (Q#50)	58	39	63	55	53	27	58	51	63	30

Table 14

Percent of Students Endorsing Athletics/Social Related Items
by Campus

Questionnaire Item	College-Wide N=1,903		Campus: North N=525		Campus: South N=826		Campus: Wolfson N=337		Campus: Medical N=214	
	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade	Ideal College	Miami-Dade
Has An Active Social Life Program (Q#30)	75	51	77	57	76	47	75	53	69	47
Has Excellent Athletic/ Recreational Facilities (Q#43)	72	61	75	71	73	66	72	52	63	34
Has A Strong Intercollegiate Athletic Program (Q#44)	65	51	68	59	63	50	68	49	60	35

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